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UNCLAS AMMAN 002469

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON THE ARAB SUMMIT

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, March 31, highlights Arab efforts to "salvage" the Arab summit. Papers feature the scheduled meeting today between King Abdullah and Egyptian President Mubarak in Sharm Al-Sheikh. Papers also highlight reports about the decision to allow the U.S. National Security Advisor to testify before the 9/11 investigative committee.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Why did they make it fail?"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/31): "The conference of wasted dreams, the conference of oppressed people, the conference that was and then was not. We do not claim that the Arab people had pinned big hopes on that Arab summit conference, for frustration is prevalent. However, the Arab people felt that this conference must take place, even if it was out of courtesy . and even if it was for show, so as we are belittled in the eyes of the enemies.. Why did they not meet? Who 'shuffled' the game? Who is the mastermind and the saboteur? Why was the truth not told to the people? Who dictated, was it America or Israel? Yes, it is the two enemies, America and Israel. They are the ones capable of directing events and turning things in their favor. They are not above anything. After all, the person who assassinates, arrests, destroys, drops missiles on peaceful people, would it be beyond him to conspire and cancel a conference for the Arab leaders? Why did the summit conference fail? Were they (the Arab leaders) afraid of embarrassment, of the repercussions, of facing America? Whatever the reasons, what happened is shameful, and the proof is Israel's comment that it is a positive thing, meaning that there is no Arab consensus on enmity for Israel."

-- "Why all this crying over the Arab summit?"

Daily columnist Bater Wardam writes on the op-ed page center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/31): "I am baffled by the reactions of the Arab media outlets and the Arab politicians to Tunis' decision to postpone the Arab summit. It is a reaction characterized by much wailing and crying, as if the Arab nation has lost a one-time historic opportunity to fix everything.. A state of pessimism and sarcasm had prevailed among Arab politicians and media people prior to the summit. Then suddenly, it switched to all this wailing and crying and accusing the United States of working to abort the summit. If the summit had really reached a level of posing a threat to the U.S. policy, so much so that Washington would work on aborting it, then that would be a great thing. Personally, I tend to believe Colin Powell's denial of having exercised pressure on the summit and it would be in the best interest of America to have the summit convene, because at the end of the day, it will bring nothing new.. The summit may be held in Cairo and I can already anticipate what the draft final statement would say. But the Arab summit and the institutional Arab action were dealt a massive blow that would not be salvaged by Arab leaders meeting in Cairo or even in Baghdad. The Arab world is still far from institutional action, and we thank Tunis for exposing the truth."

GNEHM